The local director 78 serves as a front end to the group of real servers 80, 82. Requests from external sites on the Internet 76 are routed through the local director 78 which performs server load balancing (SLB) to determine which server or group of servers should receive the request. The local director 78 may include a service manager (such as CASA, developed by Cisco Systems, Inc. San Jose, California) which makes the load balancing decisions based on application availability, server capacity, and load distribution, for example. Load balancing algorithms such as round robin, least connections, dynamic feedback, or other load balancing applications may be used, as well known by those skilled in the art. The local director 78 may further include one or more forwarding agents which forward packets based on instructions received from the service manager. The local director may include a real-time embedded operating system (RTOS) such as Finesse developed by Cisco Systems, Inc. of San Jose, California, for example. The local director may be configured as described in U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/347,034, filed July 2, 1999, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety, and it is still pending.

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It is to be understood that the local director 78 may be different than described herein or the server load balancing may be accomplished with a device other than a local director, without departing from the scope of the invention.